

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

(1) A print data management apparatus for registering, in response to a data registration request which includes print data, the print data and for providing, in response to a data usage request, the print data relating to the data usage request, comprising:

storage means for registration of the print data; registration means for registering the print data in said storage means; and providing means for providing the print data in said storage means;

wherein, when the data registration request is received, said registration means registers the print data included in the received data registration request in said storage means, in association with authentication information for authenticating whether or not a user is eligible to use the print data, and said registration means transmits usage certificate data which includes the authentication information; and

when the data usage request which includes the authentication information is received, and when the authentication information in said storage means that corresponds to the print data relating to the received data usage request and the authentication information included in the received data usage request satisfy a predetermined relationship, said providing means transmits the print data in said storage means relating to the received data usage request.

(2) A print data management apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein:

said registration means registers the print data included in the received data registration request in said storage means, in association with usage count information which indicates the number of times the print data is permitted to be used; and

when a usage count in the usage count information in said storage means which corresponds to the print data relating to the received data usage request is greater than or equal to a predetermined number, said providing means transmits the print data in said storage means relating to the received data usage request to a print terminal, and, when the usage count in the usage count information is less than the predetermined number, transmission of the print data is prohibited.

(3) A print data management apparatus according to one of Claims 1 and 2,

wherein:

the usage certificate data further includes a network address for uniquely specifying the location of the apparatus on a network to which the apparatus is connected.

(4) A print data management apparatus according to any one of Claims 1 to 3, wherein:

the usage certificate data further includes a network address for uniquely specifying, on a network, the storage location of a program for transmitting the data usage request which includes the authentication information to the apparatus, the program being stored in the network.

(5) A print data management apparatus according to any one of Claims 1 to 4, wherein:

when a network address is included in the data registration request, said registration means transmits the usage certificate data to a destination specified by the network address, and, when no network address is included in the data registration request, said registration means transmits the usage certificate data to the sender of the data registration request.

(6) A print data management apparatus according to any one of Claims 1 to

5, wherein:

when a network address is included in the data usage request, said providing means transmits the print data to a destination specified by the network address, and, when no network address is included in the data usage request, said providing means transmits the print data to the sender of the data usage request.

(7) A computer-readable storage medium having stored therein a print data management program to be applied to a print data management apparatus as set forth in Claim 1, wherein:

    said computer-readable storage medium stores a program for causing a computer to perform processing implemented by registration means for registering print data in storage means and processing implemented by providing means for providing the print data in said storage means;

    when a data registration request is received, said registration means registers the print data included in the received data registration request in said storage means, in association with authentication information for authenticating whether or not a user is eligible to use the print data, and said registration means transmits usage certificate data which includes the authentication information; and

    when a data usage request which includes the authentication information is received, and when the authentication information in said storage means which corresponds to the print data relating to the received data usage request and the authentication information included in the received data usage request satisfy a predetermined relationship, said providing means transmits the print data in said storage means relating to the received data usage request.

(8) A computer-readable storage medium having stored therein usage

certificate data to be transmitted by a print data management apparatus as set forth in Claim 1, wherein:

    said computer-readable storage medium stores authentication information for authenticating, by said print data management apparatus, whether or not a user is eligible to use the print data and a network address for uniquely specifying, on a network, the storage location of a program for transmitting a data usage request that includes the authentication information to said print data management apparatus, the program being stored in the network.

29) A method of using print data by a computer system, wherein:

    the action of a provider for providing the print data comprises:

    a registering step of registering the print data in storage means in association with authentication information for authenticating whether or not a user is eligible to use the print data; and a transmitting step of transmitting usage certificate information that includes the authentication information to the user of the print data;

    the action of the user comprises:

    a receiving step of receiving the usage certificate data; and a transmitting step of transmitting a data usage request which includes the authentication information; and

    the action of the provider further comprises:

    a receiving step of receiving the data usage request; and a transmitting step of transmitting the print data in said storage means relating to the received data usage request when the authentication information in said storage means that corresponds to the print data relating to the received data usage request and the authentication information included in the received data usage request satisfy a

predetermined relationship.

(10) A method of using print data according to Claim 9, wherein:

the action of the provider further comprises:

    a registering step of registering the print data in said storage means in association with usage count information that indicates the number of times the print data is permitted to be used; and a transmitting step of transmitting, when a usage count in the usage count information in said storage means that corresponds to the print data relating to the received data usage request is greater than or equal to a predetermined number, the print data in said storage means that corresponds to the received data usage request to a print terminal, and prohibiting transmission of the print data when the usage count in said usage count information is less than the predetermined number.

-10-